

# CHILD AND FAMILY STRATEGY

2025-2029

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

***Lake Macquarie City Council dhumaan Awabakala ngarrakal yalawaa, yalawan, yalawanan.***

Lake Macquarie City Council acknowledges the Awabakal people and Elders past, present and future.

***Dhumaan ngayin ngarrakalu kirraanan barayidin.***

We remember and respect the Ancestors who cared for and nurtured this Country.

***Ngarrakalumba yuludaka bibayilin barayida baaduka.***

It is in their footsteps that we travel these lands and waters.

Wording by the Aboriginal Reference Group and translated by Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre.

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## MESSAGE FROM MAYOR ADAM SHULTZ

As a father of three young children and a family man at heart, I understand how important our formative years are, shaping who we become and how we view the world.

Lake Macquarie City Council is constantly looking for ways to capture and elevate children's voices, needs and ideas. We are also committed to ensuring families are connected to appropriate services and supports to aid their children's development.

The Child and Family Strategy 2025-2029 outlines three priority areas that focus on empowerment of families, connectedness of communities and child development.

It commits to strengthening and supporting engagement with young people in planning Council events and programs, as well as developing more effective communication techniques targeting children and families.

It also recognises the success and importance of initiatives like the annual You're Kidding Me Expo, which improves access to health, education and family services for kids.

The strategy also tackles the difficult and disturbing topic of family and domestic violence.

These incidents are on the rise throughout Australian society, and we in Local Government must do everything we can to put an end to it, and to support survivors.

Over the next four years, we will investigate opportunities and deliver domestic violence prevention programs across our city. We'll also work with the Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee to improve support services and community awareness of this most serious issue.

With our enviable lifestyle and incredible natural beauty, Lake Macquarie has always been a fantastic place to raise a family.

This strategy will help ensure our city continues to be a place for people of all ages to be heard, and to access the services and support they need to thrive.

**Adam Shultz**

Lake Macquarie Mayor

# STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

*Lake Macquarie City Council is committed to being a child safe organisation, by embedding the NSW Child Safe Standards into our leadership, governance and organisational culture. We acknowledge the significant lifelong impact any form of abuse can have on children and young people, and we strive to ensure all children are kept free from harm whilst engaging with our services.*

*We recognise that feeling safe is just as important as being safe. We are committed to upskilling our workforce to build awareness and accountability in embedding the standards, particularly in responding to child safety in everything we do. We aim to engage with our youngest population and those who care for them, in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them. We strive to ensure our community is a place where all children are valued, respected and, above all, safe.*







## VISION

*Lake Macquarie is a connected community where all children and families thrive. Our mission is to create a community that values and supports children and families through the early years of development.*

*We acknowledge that the first 2,000 days of a child's life are considered the most important time to positively influence children's development, sense of identity, health, learning, safety, resilience and happiness.*

*We will empower parents, carers and those who work with children to be connected and responsive to child and family needs.*

# STRATEGIC LINKS

The Child and Family Strategy is closely linked to Lake Macquarie City Council's Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035, and is aligned to its four strategic goals:

## Economic



*Our local and strategic centres provide housing, jobs and activities*

*Our city has a workforce with skills for growing industries and jobs of the future*

## Environmental



*Our city plans for climate risk and emergencies*

## Social



*Our city is welcoming, inclusive and safe*

*People in our city can access the facilities and services they need*

*Everyone can enjoy open, active and social spaces*

## Governance



*Our community is involved in decisions that affect them*

*Council services meet community needs*

*Council collaborates with businesses, government organisations and the community to improve our city*

This strategy builds on Council's commitment to social justice principles through the lens of young children and their families.

It aims to provide a clear guide as to how Council will achieve outcomes described in the Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan, ensuring the needs of children, families and those who work with children and families are reflected in Council's decision-making and service delivery.

This strategy also aligns to Council's other plans and strategies including:

- Active Recreation Strategy
- Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan
- Culturally Diverse Lake Mac
- Aboriginal Community Plan, bayikulinan
- Parks and Play Strategy.

This strategy will support the work and objectives of these plans and strategies by ensuring the voices and perspectives of children, families and those who support them are considered.

The profile of children has significantly increased in recent years at all levels of government to improve health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for children. Our strategy is informed by relevant State, national and international plans and strategies including:

- Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence
- NSW Child Safe Standards
- The National Early Years Strategy
- National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Australian Early Development Index
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Sustainable Development Goals:
  - Good health and wellbeing
  - Quality education
  - Gender equality
  - Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Along with strategic planning for children and families, NSW has also seen the creation of the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*, which provides a framework for keeping children safe, supported and seen in communities through the 10 Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme.



# LAKE MAC SNAPSHOT



**30,751**

children aged 0-11 years old

**47%** are preschool-aged



**14,591**

children aged 0-5



**11%**

of children aged 0-4 identify as  
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



**25,844**

families have dependant children  
living with them



**10,669**

one parent households

Source: REMPLAN (2025)

## COMPARED TO 2015, THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN:

- children aged 0-5 identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- the percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable in one or more, and in two or more developmental domains
- the amount of children who teachers consider need further assessment
- the attendance of children at centre-based care and preschools in the years before school.

This data provides an opportunity for Council to plan and deliver programs that will support those who work with children and families, and improve practices that reflect the demographic of our community and support children's development in all areas.

Source: NSW Government (2015-2021)





## LOCAL CONTEXT

Lake Macquarie City Council has always had a strong commitment to children and families, and has offered direct education and care services through Family Day Care since 1979.

This is the fourth version of the strategy since it was first adopted in 2009. Council is well placed within the community to deliver national, State and local priorities in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the many communities across our city.

Family structures have changed in recent years, with more fathers taking time away from work to be a primary carer of their children, greater availability of education and care services and extended family members taking on caring roles of young children. More families are also living further away from other extended family networks, and one or both parents are working more. These factors all place additional pressure on families to meet the developing needs of their children, while being available to participate in and contribute to their community lives.

The number of domestic and family violent incidents has steadily increased each year over the last five years in our city. The impacts of family violence on children are understood to profoundly impact children's physical and mental wellbeing, and their schooling. It is also the leading cause

of homelessness for children in Australia (Campo, 2015). Research and policy development have demonstrated that primary prevention strategies are key to ending violence in communities. They include respectful relationship programs, better understanding of violence drivers and challenging rigid gender roles and attitudes towards violence. Council is uniquely positioned to promote and support primary prevention strategies, increase understanding of domestic and family violence and nurture partnerships for collaborative approaches to ending violence in our communities.

It has been reported through the national Early Years Strategy that families are yearning for close, connected and supportive communities for their children to grow up in. Council has the opportunity to build social connection and strength in communities to empower families, support service delivery and ensure children thrive in their early years.

Finally, services in Lake Macquarie continue to adopt a collaborative and strengths-based approach when working with families. The complexities of families cannot be solved by one organisation; it truly takes a village to raise strong, confident and resilient children. Lake Macquarie City Council is proud to be part of that village supporting families and children.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*Council targeted three key stakeholder groups during consultation to inform the development of this strategy.*



## Children

**69 submissions** were received from children and primary schools through engagement about the Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035.



## Parents and carers

Council reached more than **90,000** people through Council's social media and e-newsletters, with 60 responses collected from our online survey.



## Service providers who work with children and families

An invite to attend a workshop was sent to more than **300 emails** in Council's child and family network, with 19 service staff participating and providing feedback.

# WHAT DID WE HEAR?

## Children

- Children are passionate about the outdoors, environment and the lake, with 78% of children mentioning these elements in their submission.
- Children are thoughtful towards marginalised communities, including people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with almost 28% of submissions referring to engaging, promoting or celebrating culture and differences.
- Environmental sustainability is prevalent in their thoughts, with 32% of submissions referring to healthy environments.

*"We need a healthy living style with a healthy environment."*

– GEORGIA, FLORAVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT

*"With care and community, our future can be bright."*

– EIGHT-YEAR-OLD MACY

# WHAT DID WE HEAR?

## Parents

### MOST RESPONDENTS SAID:

- “they can play sports and access play spaces” **89%.**
- “they love where they live and feel safe where they live” **75%.**

However, there are improvements such as “more innovative play spaces for families”, including:

- waterways and nature play
- more inclusive play spaces for small children aged six months to two years
- identifying the need for more footpaths for access around local communities
- there is currently minimal police presence in areas around the lake.

### FEWER RESPONDENTS AGREED WITH THE STATEMENTS:

- “I know what it happening where I live” **33%.**
- “I have a say in the things that matter to me” **25%.**
- “I know what Council does and what they offer” **31%.**
- “There are learning and development opportunities for children under five” **25%.**

### KEY FEEDBACK:

- More information needed on local events
- Opt-in options required for project updates
- Social media and community groups are key information sources for families

### THE STATEMENT THAT MOST PEOPLE DISAGREED WITH:

- “My family and I can get the help we need” **35%.**

Most respondents provided additional feedback about the public health system and access to supports for children with mental health/neurodivergence and developmental concerns.

### BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS AND CARERS, COUNCIL WILL TARGET SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO INCREASE:

- knowledge of services, programs and resources available to families
- access to a variety of services, programs and supports
- opportunities for families to provide feedback to Council

*“People of all ages walking on trails, surrounded by trees and the lake”*

– EIGHT-YEAR-OLD STUDENT AT FLORAVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOL

*“I like to learn about the different allied health professionals and their role in the health of our children”*

– PARENT RESPONDENT TO YOU'RE KIDDING ME PROGRAM SURVEY

## Service

### LOCAL SERVICES PARTICIPATED IN A WORKSHOP ADDRESSING:

- how active and healthy our community is, especially children
- how connected our community is, especially for families
- how our children and families feel welcomed, supported, valued and celebrated through a cultural lens
- how well we listen to the voices of children
- whether our children are ready to grow up with respect and appreciation for the environment and feel confident to navigate environmental change.

### THE KEY PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE:

- more support and access to sport and other activities, especially activities parents can do/ learn with their children
- offering community education workshops, for example, budget-friendly lunchboxes
- increasing the number of sensory spaces for families, especially ones that include water
- increasing the number of supported networks such as playgroups and parent groups, and promoting these through a planned calendar of events

- addressing children's anxieties around climate change through use of child-friendly language and resources
- upskilling and educating our services on how to respond to emergencies
- First Nations culture and heritage to be visible and embedded throughout the community.

*"We need to address children's anxieties around climate change."*

– SERVICE PROVIDER DURING STRATEGY CONSULTATION

*"While every year of childhood is influential to development, the early years are when we set children up to achieve good health and wellbeing outcomes for their whole life."*

– NATIONAL EARLY YEARS STRATEGY





# ACTION PLAN

This action plan will be delivered by Council’s Community Partnerships department, in partnership with other relevant departments of Council.



**OUTCOME 1.**  
**FAMILIES ARE**  
**CONNECTED,**  
**EMPOWERED AND**  
**SUPPORTED TO RAISE**  
**CHILDREN IN THE EARLY**  
**YEARS**

Throughout the review of strategies and Council’s local consultation with families and services, it was evident that families are wanting to be more informed about issues that impact them, the available supports and access to relevant information.

Council understands that families are busy, and designing effective communication channels that tap into existing avenues will help ease the burden on families to be better connected and supported.

**OBJECTIVE 1.1 FAMILIES AND CHILDREN ARE INFORMED ON MATTERS THAT IMPACT THEM**

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Deliver appropriate and effective communication and marketing campaigns on platforms accessible to children and family, including child-friendly language and signage at parks	Number of key engagement projects  Communication plans include communication for children	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 4.1 and 4.3
Pilot new engagement methods for those experiencing social isolation, such as shopping centre and school visits to increase knowledge and connection to local supports, services and issues that might impact them	Number of engagement methods annually  Number of key engagement projects  Satisfaction with family and community services	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 3.2 and 4.1  Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2024-2028

## OBJECTIVE 1.2 FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Deliver a family support newsletter	Number of subscriptions Deliver 12 family newsletters annually	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 3.2
Review the family support resources available in the city, and identify opportunities to improve family access to services	Review complete and shared with local sector services and networks Satisfaction with family and community services	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 3.2
Investigate the accessibility of supports for new parents and share findings with local services	Number of services engaged Satisfaction with family and community services	External organisations and partnerships	Community Strategic Plan 3.2
Promote the availability of support for new parents	Flyers and newsletters distributed annually Number of subscriptions to e-newsletter Satisfaction with family and community services	External organisations and partnerships	Community Strategic Plan 3.2
Deliver the annual You're Kidding Me Expo	Expo is delivered each year Annual expo surveys Number of people engaged	External organisations and partnerships	Community Strategic Plan 3.2 and 4.4
Establish a playgroup for grandparents and grandchildren	Playgroup is established Annual playgroup surveys		Community Strategic Plan 3.2
Create a guide of funded support services available for families and services, updated and published annually	Guide is uploaded onto Council website annually Satisfaction with family and community services	IT Communications and corporate strategy	Community Strategic Plan 3.2





## OUTCOME 2. INFORMED AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Services that work with families in Lake Macquarie are on the frontline of ensuring that supports are tailored to the needs of the community.

Ensuring that services are well connected, have shared understanding of current trends and issues, and are offered opportunities for collaboration is key to supporting the complex needs of children and families in the early years.

Furthermore, with the belief that children are experts in their own lives, it is paramount that Council honours the perspectives of children and reflects this in our planning and delivery of programs.

### OBJECTIVE 2.1 FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES ARE INFORMED AND CONNECTED

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Strengthen and support the children and family services sector through quarterly network meetings	Four network meetings delivered each year Number of people engaged	External organisations	Community Strategic Plan 3.2 and 4.4
Using Australian Early Development Census Data, initiate a network group aimed at delivering a collective impact initiative addressing vulnerabilities in child development across the city	Network established Increased knowledge of child development vulnerabilities in the city Percentage of participants reporting positive behaviour change following participation in programs delivered by Council	Arts, Culture and Tourism	Community Strategic Plan 3.2 Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2024-2028
Deliver an annual asset mapping workshop in one local community each year	One workshop delivered each year Number of key engagement projects Number of people engaged Summary of outcomes and future opportunities shared with stakeholders		Community Strategic Plan 3.2, 4.1 and 4.4 Aboriginal Community Plan



## OBJECTIVE 2.2 THE VOICES AND NEEDS OF CHILDREN ARE HEARD AND CONSIDERED IN PLANNING

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Advocate for the needs of children in Council infrastructure and facilities, to design well-planned playground and outdoor spaces that meet the needs of children and families	Variety of playground designs across the city Community satisfaction with open, active and social spaces	Assets City Projects	Community Strategic Plan 3.1 and 3.3 Parks and Play Strategy Sport Strategy 2021-2031 Active Recreation Strategy
Conduct a review for how children's voices are captured in planning	Review completed Suggestions for improvement documented and shared with relevant departments	Arts, Culture and Tourism Leisure Services Assets	Community Strategic Plan 3.1 Children's Guardian Act 2019 Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2024-2028
Investigate the establishment of a children's Parliament so children can participate further in civic life and have a say on projects that are relevant to them	Children's Parliament established Number of key engagement projects Number of people engaged	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 3.1 and 4.1





### OUTCOME 3. FOR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP, GROW AND THRIVE IN THE EARLY YEARS

The first 2,000 days in a child's life are considered the most important for establishing lifelong outcomes.

For children to participate in life to the fullest, they must feel safe and be safe. Council plays a significant role in the community to promote and embed opportunities for children's safety.

Furthermore, supporting families to create enriching environments and providing children with access to wellbeing opportunities will enhance strong connections to and within their community.

### OBJECTIVE 3.1 THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN IS PRIORITISED

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Continue to implement the 10 Child Safe Standards across Council operations	Annual report of child safe actions (Internal)	Council wide	Community Strategic Plan 3.1 Children's Guardian Legislation 2019
Deliver opportunities for emergency planning and/or climate risk training and planning for schools and early years services	Delivery of workshops Participant uptake of climate resilience and disaster preparedness following programs delivered by Council Perception of preparedness for natural disasters Program logic survey completed	External partnerships	Community Strategic Plan 2.3 Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2027
Investigate opportunities to deliver domestic violence primary prevention programs across communities	Grant applications Participation in training and network collaboratives Levels of crime in the city (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research) Sense of personal safety	External collaborations	Community Strategic Plan 3.1, 4.3 and 4.4 Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence
Facilitate the Lake Macquarie Domestic Violence Committee to increase domestic violence awareness and action initiatives	Number of people engaged Number of partnerships Engagement of social media campaigns Sense of personal safety	External partnerships	Community Strategic Plan 3.1, 4.3 and 4.4 Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

## OBJECTIVE 3.2 CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO A RANGE OF PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ACTION	PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PARTNER DEPARTMENT	STRATEGY LINK
Deliver the annual You're Kidding Me program	Program logic surveys Number of partnerships Number of people engaged Percentage of participants reporting positive behaviour change following participation in programs delivered by Council		Community Strategic Plan 3.2 and 4.4
Develop an annual targeted campaign to highlight importance of engagement in early years education	Media engagement report Funding reporting	Communications and Corporate Strategy	Community Strategic Plan 1.4 and 3.2 Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2024-2028
Encourage use of under-utilised facilities for delivery of children's recreation and creative activities through a program of 'come and try' days with local businesses	Satisfaction with locally-owned and operated businesses Number of people engaged Number of partnerships		Community Strategic Plan 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, 3.3 and 4.4 Sport Strategy 2021-2031 Active Recreation Strategy Community Facilities Strategy
Engage with First Nations people so their voices can be incorporated into planning and programming	Number of initiatives delivered with First Nations perspective included Satisfaction with community being welcoming to all people		Community Strategic Plan 3.4 Lake Mac Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2024-2028 Aboriginal Community Plan





# MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Actions from this strategy will be included in Council's annual operational plan. The progress of this strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure actions are on track.

An evaluation of the strategy will be undertaken during annual progress reviews and again at the finalisation of the strategy in 2029.





# REFERENCES

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